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## Ex-Intelligence Aide Says Westmoreland Delayed a Key Cable

By M. A. FARBER

Maj. Gen. Joseph A. McChristian, who was chief of intelligence for Gen. William C. Westmoreland in Vietnam for two years, testified yesterday that General Westmoreland acted improperly in 1967 by delaying a cable to Washington reporting higher enemy strength because it would be "a political bombshell."

"It was improper not to send a strength report forward based on political considerations," General McChristian told the jury in the trial of General Westmoreland's \$120 million libel suit against CBS.

General McChristian, who left Vietnam for another assignment shortly after the cable incident, recalled General Westmoreland saying he wanted to study the cable, and he testified that he did not know what the commander had ultimately done with the data in it.

General Westmoreland testified last November that he wanted a full briefing on the new figures and eventually informed his superiors of the data. But General McChristian contradicted General Westmoreland's testimony about the cable incident on a number of points. And he took issue with General Westmoreland's testimony that the Vietcong's self-defense forces were not

a military threat and could not be counted accurately.

He held aloft a homemade hand grenade that he said was commonly used by those part-time, hamlet-based forces, and said they were an "integral part" of the enemy's strength.

The basis for General Westmoreland's suit was a 1982 CBS documentary, "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," that charged a "conspiracy" by General Westmoreland's command in Vietnam in 1967 to show progress in the war by understating North Vietnamese and Vietcong strength.

General McChristian — a retired veteran of 38 years in the Army who also served General Westmoreland as chief of intelligence when the latter became Army Chief of Staff in 1968 — appeared in Federal District Court in Manhattan as the highest-ranking military witness called by CBS in the 17-week-old trial before Judge Pierre N. Leval.

General Westmoreland, who was seated a few feet in front and to the

right of General McChristian, showed no emotion during five hours of testimony by his former aide. General McChristian — who, like the plaintiff, is 70 years old — kept his eyes on the jury and the lawyers. The craggy-faced major general, casually attired in a blue blazer, gray slacks and tan sweater, tended to rest his head on the tips of his fingers, as in contemplation.

In the CBS documentary, General McChristian discussed a meeting in May 1967 with General Westmoreland about the cable on enemy strength.

The former intelligence chief said on the broadcast that General Westmoreland had been "quite disturbed" by the "large increase in figures that we had developed" and "by the time I left his office, I had the definite impression that he felt that if he sent those figures back to Washington at that time, it would create a political bombshell."

Yesterday, General McChristian told the jury that General Westmoreland had actually used the words "political bombshell."

### Five-Month Analysis

General McChristian said he took the cable to General Westmoreland's office one evening in mid-May 1967, without an appointment. The new figures in the cable, General McChristian testified, were the result of five months of analytical work on three categories of Vietcong strength — the self-defense forces, guerrillas and a political cadre.

General McChristian said General Westmoreland was seated at his desk, alone, when he entered.

"I stood in front of his desk and handed the cable to him," the witness said under questioning by David Boies, a lawyer for CBS. "I gave him a little bit of background in what it was. He read it. He looked up at me and he said:

"If I send that cable to Washington, it will create a political bombshell."

Q. Sir, I want to ask you, are you absolutely positive General Westmoreland used the term "political bombshell" during that meeting?

A. Yes, I am. I am just as sure of it as I am of seeing people in front of me right now. I was so surprised by it that there were enough words said that they burned themselves right into my memory.

General McChristian said the commander asked no questions about the evidence or methodology supporting the cable.

Q. Did General Westmoreland decline to send the cable you gave him?

A. When he told me it would create a political bombshell, I said, "General, I don't see why it should. Send me back and I'll explain to anyone who wants to know what we've been doing to collect this information." And he said, "No. Leave it with me. I want to go over it."

Q. At any time prior to this time in your military service had you ever had a superior officer discuss with you the political implications of any enemy strength estimate?

A. No, sir.

### Different Versions of Incident

During an aggressive cross-examination, David M. Dorsen, a lawyer for General Westmoreland, attempted to show that General McChristian had given differing versions of the incident.

Mr. Dorsen asked whether the witness had told Samuel A. Adams, a former Central Intelligence Agency analyst who was a paid consultant for the CBS documentary, that General Westmoreland had said about the cable: "I can't understand this and I want to be briefed."

General McChristian said General Westmoreland had not made that statement, and he did not recall saying as much to Mr. Adams. Mr. Dorsen showed the witness notes made by Mr. Adams, but the major general said they did not "refresh" his memory.

Mr. Dorsen asked General McChristian whether he believed that General Westmoreland "had the right" to delay sending the cable, and showed the witness a paragraph of a pretrial affidavit in which he said: "Although this was the first time he had ever questioned my intelligence, he certainly had every right to do so, especially since he had not been briefed in detail on our intelligence holdings which we used to accomplish these figures."

"He had every right to question my intelligence," General McChristian said, "but this is not what happened in that meeting."

When Mr. Dorsen asked the witness whether he believed that General Westmoreland had attempted to "suppress" the data, General McChristian repeated that "this was the only time he exercised any control over my report-

ing. And he asked to hold it up based on political considerations."

Mr. Dorsen then showed the witness the transcript of a telephone conversation he had in 1982 with Don Kowet, the co-author of a TV Guide article on the documentary.

Q. Did Mr. Kowet ask you whether you believed you were being asked by General Westmoreland to suppress the information and you said "absolutely not"?

"I want to put this in the proper context," General McChristian replied. "There's a difference between talking under oath and talking to a journalist over the phone." General McChristian said he was "guarded" with Mr. Kowet because he did not know him and he normally refrained from quoting General Westmoreland.

Continued

**Denied Using "Bombshell" Term**

Similiarly, General McChristian said, he did not quote General Westmoreland's exact words when he was interviewed for the CBS documentary.

Mr. Dorsen then showed the witness an unbroadcast portion of his CBS interview in which he said of the meeting with General Westmoreland: "I can't recall his exact words at this time, but that is my strong impression of exactly what happened."

In his own testimony, General Westmoreland denied using the term "political bombshell" and recalled saying to General McChristian: "Joe, if this cable goes in without further explanation it will create a public relations problem."

The former commander said he also told General McChristian that the self-defense forces were "basically civilians" who did not belong in the military listing of enemy strength known as the order of battle.

General McChristian testified that he did not remember General Westmoreland making those statements.

According to documents produced earlier in the case, General Westmoreland — and his immediate superior, Adm. Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, the commander of American forces in the Pacific — were briefed on the higher figures for irregulars in late May 1967, two weeks after General McChristian presented the cable, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were informed several months later. By then, General McChristian had taken up a new assignment as commander of the Second Armored Division at Fort Hood, Tex.

The C.I.A. argued in 1967 for a total enemy strength estimate of 500,000 to 600,000. Without the self-defense forces, and with the placement of the political cadre in a separate nonmilitary listing — which General McChristian said yesterday was unwarranted — General Westmoreland's command successfully advanced a total of enemy military strength between 223,000 and 248,000. That range was a decline of about 50,000 from the figure then in use.